

DRAFT

Note: These Minutes will remain DRAFT until approved at the next meeting of the Committee

GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 11 MARCH 2025

Councillors Present: Howard Woollaston (Vice-Chairman in the Chair), Dominic Boeck, Laura Coyle, Billy Drummond, Owen Jeffery, Janine Lewis (Substitute for Jeremy Cottam - Online), Alan Macro (Substitute for Councillor Erik Pattenden), and Stephanie Steevenson

Also Present: Simon Carey (Independent Member – Audit), Sam Chiverton (Zoom Host), Sarah Clarke (Monitoring Officer and Interim Executive Director (Resources)), Shannon Coleman-Slaughter (Service Director (Finance, Property and Procurement) (S151 Officer)), Chris Dagnall (Senior Financial Controller (Interim)), Nicola Thomas (Service Lead, Legal and Democratic Services), and Darius Zarazel (Principal Democratic Services Officer)

Apologies for inability to attend the meeting: Councillor Erik Pattenden, Parish Council representative David Southgate, Councillor David Marsh, and Councillor Jeremy Cottam

PART I

1 Declarations of Interest

Councillors Dominic Boeck and Billy Drummond declared that they had been previously subject to the process outlined in Part 13, Appendix E. However, as this was not an other registerable interest, registerable interest, or disclosable pecuniary interest, they determined to remain to take part in the debate and vote on the matter.

2 Constitutional changes (C4646)

The Committee considered a report (Agenda Item 3) concerning proposed Constitutional changes.

The Service Lead for Legal and Democratic Services introduced the report and highlighted that it was the result of the work of the Constitution Review Task Group who had been working to update and amend the constitution. This report focused on Part 13 of the constitution, relating to codes and protocols, and proposed several substantial changes.

Notably, an initial assessment stage by the Monitoring Officer (MO) was proposed. This would allow the MO to review complaints and ensure that all of the evidence required was provided, and that they relate to the Code, before being progressed. In addition, it was proposed that the advisory panel stage would be removed. These amendments were suggested in order to reduce the processing time for complaints and remove any steps that did not provide significant added value.

Other proposals included combining all codes relating to Members into one appendix, and therefore deleting all the others, enabling the Leader to make an annual report to Council whilst giving allowances for the opposition to respond, and increasing speaking rights from three to five minutes. All other changes were suggested in order to bring the Code more in line with the model Code and the Nolan Principles.

Members thanked the Constitution Review Task Group and Officers for their work on the proposed amendments. A series of minor grammatical amendments were proposed and

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the Service Lead for Legal and Democratic Services indicated that recommendation E in the report would allow for these amendments to be made outside of the Committee meeting. She encouraged any Member with these types of minor amendments to submit them to her.

In response to a question about the purpose for the report, and if it was a result of a faulty process being identified, the Service Lead for Legal and Democratic Services indicated that the Constitution was under constant review, and this was the next section that was due for reconsideration. She assured the Committee that the process was effective but that recent standards complaints had provided the Council with opportunities to learn and improve its processes.

There was discussion about the potential timescale for responses, and that there was a lack of clarity about what would happen should a subject Member or complainant not be able to meet a deadline for a good reason. In response, the Service Lead for Legal and Democratic Services indicated that the MO had previously allowed for extensions to the deadlines if it was considered reasonable, but that this could be explicitly added into the document. The Committee agreed that additional wording should be added to any timescale outlined in the document which would allow for an extension if a reasonable excuse was provided.

On the proposed wording on point 10.1 (iii), Members agreed that this should be simplified to indicate that the meeting will be adjourned if the subject member/complainant provided a valid reason, if no valid reason was provided, then it would proceed.

The Committee welcomed the removal of the advisory panel stage, the ability to dismiss politically motivated complaints at an early stage, and the attempt to shorten the time taken to deal with standards complaints. Despite some Members highlighting concerns about the historic consistency that the Council had handled complaints, they were assured that the proposed amendments would bring the Council more in line with the Model Code. This would give the Council greater access to existing guidance and examples that could be used to ensure a consistent approach was taken. Members also noted that the Governance Committee were the final arbiters of standards complaints, so that they would always have that oversight.

Members discussed the role of the Independent Members and Independent Investigator in the complaints process. The Monitoring Officer and Interim Executive Director (Resources) clarified that Independent Members have not attended complaints hearings, as this is the role of the Independent Investigator who put together the report. In addition, she indicated that the Council was looking for suitably qualified candidates but that they were constrained due to a lack of budget.

The Committee noted the revised flowchart outlining the complaints process but agreed that this should include the 'pre-assessment' stage wording that was used in the body of the report to ensure a consistent approach was taken throughout the Constitution.

Overall, as the Committee were satisfied with the report, they agreed to approve the recommendations, subject to the agreed amendments: that added wording be included when a deadline was proposed allowing for an extension should a reasonable excuse be provided, that point 10.1 (iii) be clarified, and that the flow charts match the wording in the body of the constitution, such as including the preassessment stage.

RESOLVED: That following amendments are recommended to Council for approval:

- (a) Part 13 Code of conduct Appendix A be deleted.
- (b) Part 13 Code of conduct Appendix E be adopted as set out in Appendix A to the report subject to the agreed amendments by the Governance Committee.

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- (c) Part 13 Code of conduct Appendix G be deleted.
- (d) Part 13 Code of conduct Appendix H be adopted as set out in Appendix B to the report.
- (e) Delegates to the Monitoring Officer in consultation with the Chairman of the Constitution Review Task Group the power to update Parts 13 of the Constitution to ensure that this reflects the new rules, and to make any minor additional corrections to the parts of the Constitution to ensure consistency in terminology and presentation.
- (f) That the updated version of Part 3 - Meeting Procedure Rules be adopted.
- (g) Agrees that the changes to the Constitution detailed in this report, take effect from 1 April 2025.

3 Financial Year End 2024-25 Year End Planning Document (G4665)

The Committee considered a report (Agenda Item 4) concerning the Year End 2024-25 Financial Planning Document.

The Senior Financial Controller (Interim) introduced the report and highlighted that the 2023/24 Statement of Accounts had been approved by KPMG at the end of February 2025, in line with the Backstop deadline. He also indicated that the 2024/25 planning was underway. Appendix A to the report outlined updates to the Councils accounting policy with the key change being the adoption of the IRF16 financial reporting standard. Taking advice from the Council's treasury advisor, the Council is working on finalising the year end document with the aim to complete it ahead of the deadline on 30 June 2025.

In response to a question about past audits, the Senior Financial Controller (Interim) confirmed to the Committee that the 2020/21 accounts were fully audited, and the 2021/22 and 2022/23 audits received a disclaimed opinion in line with the Central Government approved Backstop. All of those audits had been filed and published within the deadline. In addition, Members noted that the Council was up to date with their accounts.

Members questioned some data points in the document which were still marked as being 'TBC'. However, they were assured that this was normal at this stage of the process and that these figures would be known by the end of April and confirmed in due course.

On the Appendix to the report, the Senior Financial Controller (Interim) clarified to the Committee that the reason why the Downs and Compton schools were separated from the rest was due to the different systems that they used, but the data taken was the same from the other schools, and was also treated the same. Members also requested that the report reflect the current name of the Committee and thereby remove reference to 'Ethics'.

Overall, as the Committee were satisfied with the report, they agreed to approve the recommendations.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee:

- (a) Approves the draft accounting policies which will be applied in the production of the Council's 2024/25 Statement of Accounts (Appendix A to the report).

That the Committee notes:

- (a) KPMG is the Council's external auditor. KPMG issued a disclaimed audit opinion on the Council's 2023/24 Statement of Accounts and the financial statements were approved on 28 February 2025. The statutory deadline for publishing the 2024/25

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Statement of Accounts is 30 June 2025. The public inspection period will commence in early July 2025.

- (b) The internal year-end timetable which will complement the production of the 2024/25 Draft Statement of Accounts (Appendix B to the report).

(The meeting commenced at 6.30 pm and closed at 7.17 pm)

CHAIRMAN

Date of Signature